

To: Representative Wittich, Chair
Human Services Committee

From: Aart Dolman 

3016 Central Avenue
Great Falls, MT. 59401

Date: February 7, 2015

Re: HB 383

Dear Chairman Wittich and Human Services Committee members.

I strongly support HB383, which proposes to establish a Montana Student Mental Health Screening Pilot Program.

For quite a few years, I have observed the development of preventive Mental Health Care in the City of Great Falls. As a former member of the Center for Mental Healths Foundation Board for many years, I have been active advocate for Mental Health issues in families. The intent of this legislation is to find a way to cut down the suicide rate of children in Montana.

Through the practice of preventive Mental Health care services our Great Falls community had made some major inroads in the attempt to prevent crisis situations for children. In particular, our School District has for many years has participated in a comprehensive program in to identify children with emotional difficulties and it has successfully worked diligently with related community organizations to prevent children's Mental Health Crises. Public school counselors, staff from the Center of Mental Health including the privately run Aware program, and the Cascade County Public Health clinic are merely a few examples of the many individuals and organizations which cooperate and coordinate this effective preventive Mental Health program for children.

This community wide preventive Mental Health program consists of early identification, referrals, and followup treatment from birth to adulthood. For instance, the Great Falls Head Start preventive care program accepts young children, from birth to age three, in close cooperation with the non-governmental Aware organization. The intent is to prepare these young children for the Head Start program, and this is done by working directly with children, parents, and professional staff in all aspects of Mental Health care. Early identification of a Mental Health issue in a very young child is the key to effective treatment of Mental illness, and via it referral system it facilitates treatment before the emergence of a crisis situation. This benefits our community because crisis intervention and its follow up treatment is financially expensive.

Preventive Mental Health care is necessary to cut down the unacceptable suicide rate of Montana children. Since preventive Physical Health care is already available in many Montana communities, there is no reason that a similar program for preventive Mental Health care cannot be implemented. As shown in our Great Falls area preventive Mental Health care brings down the children's suicide rate for it is based upon early detection and an effective referral system leading to treatment. This can also be done by those living in rural areas. The key to preventive Mental Health Care resides in the involvement of parents, school staff including supporting organizations, and this is outlined in the language of HB 383.

It is for this reason that I ask that the House Human Services Committee approves HB 383.